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Can A Christian Be A Witch?

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Can a Christian be a Witch?

We have been discussing **female authority and power in The Bible. (https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reclaimingthetruth/2023/06/what-is-the-gender-of-g-d/)** Along the same lines, while doing some research recently, I came across several stories of "Christian Witches." This was not a new idea to me having grown up in The Appalachian Mountains. However, I suspect it may come as a shock to many Christians. So, can a Christian be a witch?

Can a Christian Be a Witch?

Those Christians who grew up in churches that burned Harry Potter are surely thinking that Witchcraft and Christianity can never mix. However, while those Christians were burning books, somewhere deep in the Appalachian Mountains a Granny witch was praying away a wart or reading a Bible verse to stop blood. Some Granny witch was indeed telling someone the future from a prophetic dream they had or relaying information from G-d, which they learned in a vision. These Granny Witches identified as Christian.

The Preacher Witch

In fact, Matthew Sparks in his paper ***"The Charm Doctors' of Leslie County: Oral histories of male witches, midwives, and faith healers in Leslie County, Kentucky 1878-1978," (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367775836_The_'Charm_Doctors'_of_Leslie_County_Or 1978)*** tells us the story of witchy George Joseph who was "a very religious man and a preacher." Yet, George would tell people things were going to happen and they would happen. He would speak to and control animals. He used charms to remove growths on humans and he cursed the bullets of hunters so that they would miss their targets.

Irish Scots and Cherokee

George, like many in the mountains, was of Irish descent. The Appalachian mountains were settled by Irish Scots who combined their traditional practices with those of the Cherokee. What resulted was Appalachian Granny Magic. This magic involves a deep respect for the land and a knowledge of how to use the land for the good of the community. Sara Amis, an instructor at the University of Georgia, was quoted speaking of Appalachian practitioners of both magic and Christianity who had roots in Ireland and Scotland. **Folklife magazine (https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/appalachian-folk-magic)** quoted her as saying, "Their approach to Christianity is animist. To them spirit is very present in the world- it's present in the rock, so they go and pray to the rock, or they pray at the rock if someone is sick,"

So, given that many in Appalachia practice Christianity in a different way than the rest of the world and that there are people who identify as both preacher and witch, we must be cautious when we ask, "Can a witch be a Christian?" We must be careful about how we define the word witch.

What is a witch?

Throughout history, the word witch has meant many things. From wise woman to devil worshipper, the word has been massively overused and misunderstood. For some of us, a witch is a green lady who rides a broom in Halloween cartoons. For others, a witch is a wise woman who heals using the powers of nature. Still, other people think of a woman or man who has sold their soul to Satan in exchange for powers. Some think of a woman over a cauldron making potions. Others think of witches as anyone with pagan or non-Christian beliefs. Therefore, what a witch is really depends on who you ask. We all bring with us our own predispositions.

It seems even amongst practitioners of The Craft, what defines a witch is debated. In my research, I found many women who called themselves faith healers, some who admitted to "witchery," and a couple of men who confessed to cursing G-d and serving Satan.

Anthony Cavender says in **Folklife magazine (https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/appalachian-folk-magic)** that using a charm to take the fire out of a burn is "the work of the lord." However, in the book ***Up Cutshin and Down Greasy*** **(https://www.amazon.com/Up-Cutshin-Down-Greasy-Folkways/dp/081310176X)**there is the story of Mat Layson, a name the author used to protect the real identity of the person. Mat took his son into the hills to train him as a witch. The story says he set a silver plate on the ground. Then he cursed the Lord and blessed the Devil. Then he shot at the sun three times. With each shot a drop of clear blood would fall into the silver plate. He then told the boy to put his hands at the top of his head and bottom of his feet and swear to give all between those hands to the Devil.

A Witch By Any Other Name

With such diverse definitions, even amongst The Craft's own practitioners, how can we possibly come up with one definition by which to judge all "witches?" The truth is, maybe we can't. For this reason, many Appalachian Granny Witches who also practice Christianity have chosen alternate titles such as faith healer, charmer, witchdoctor, wise woman, or Granny woman. Sara Amis is quoted in "***Appalachian Folk Magic and Granny Witchcraft,"*** **(https://www.learnreligions.com/appalachian-folk-magic-4779929)** as saying, "Our people don't always call this magic…and they don't always call it witchcraft. It's just what you do." By using alternate words some Granny Witches separated themselves from the darker images of witchcraft.

However, it is important to note that many of the practitioners still use the word witch publicly and that almost all Appalachian Granny Witches admit they use The Craft or Charms when in familial or "safe" settings. They willingly admit to having an otherworldly power that not all people, or even all Christians, can access.

Can a Christian Be a Witch? What the Church Says:

Traditionally, this has caused division between the church and Granny Witches who practice Christianity. The church felt threatened by anything outside of itself that could offer a bridge to the supernatural world. In the Book ***Up Cutshin and Down Greasy*** **(https://www.amazon.com/Up-Cutshin-Down-Greasy-Folkways/dp/081310176X)** the author tells us he stopped blood once when his brother got steel in his hand and a preacher said to him "It just quit itself-you never done it. You're not a Christian, and you can't work miracles like that." The author later proves to the preacher he has the power, by stopping the nosebleed of a boy the preacher had been praying for unsuccessfully.

Can a Christian Be a Witch? What The Bible Says:

The reason most Christians are against witchcraft is that **Exodus 22:18 (https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=exodus%2022:18&version=KJV)** says, "[18] Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. " While this may seem to be a straightforward commandment, as we've seen above, determining what is meant by the word witch is not so simple.

Joseph interpreted dreams. Moses parted the sea. Jesus healed the sick and brought the dead to life again. All the prophets predicted the future. Further, Jesus tells us, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father." Acts 2:17 says, "'In the last days, G-d says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."

So if all these things are legal and gifts of the faith, what does Exodus 22 mean? It would seem that our modern definition of witch is not what the Bible writers had in mind. I believe the writers of The Bible were thinking of the sorcerers they had encountered as slaves in Egypt. This interpretation seems likely considering that the Hebrew word translated in this verse as witch is more accurately translated as sorcerer. The sorcerers of Egypt performed for The Pharoh, and their magic was part of their religion. Therefore, their sin was idolatry.

This interpretation of course does not excuse pagans or witches who sell their souls to Satan. However, it does make room for those who practice the aforementioned gifts. In this way, so-called Christian witches may find peace with their two identities.

So, Can a Christian Be a Witch? Final Verdict

The answer to can a Christian be a witch depends greatly on what we deem to be a witch. Whatever that looks like, I find much more Biblical evidence for a Christian witch than I do for burning a witch at the stake. Perhaps, we should proceed with grace and leave the judgments to G-d.